

How are you coping with Covid-19 stressors?

A potentially prolonged, gradual easing of national restrictions combined with the invisible and ever-present threat of the virus is causing a lingering sense of uncertainty for many South Africans.



Rucksana Christian

"South Africa's response to the Covid-19 threat has left the country in a pre-traumatic state characterised by high levels of uncertainty, a sense of diminished control and high levels of fear and helplessness," says Rucksana Christian, Health Squared's consulting clinical psychologist.

"While this may feel overwhelming at times, it is an entirely normal reaction to the unfolding situation. Social distancing is a preventative measure in limiting the transmission of the virus, however it can also be isolating for many people.

"Lack of social support and the disruption to our daily lives can amplify fears about the virus and the unknowable consequences it may bring, to the point where these fears may become incapacitating," she points out.

"Essential service personnel such as frontline health workers, security and supermarket staff, could potentially experience feelings of helplessness due to the possible exposure risks they face in the line of duty on a daily basis.

"A useful strategy for coping with these sources of stress is to focus one's efforts on moving from a mental space of fear to one of a sense of control. When we take charge of the situation, we feel more empowered."

Tips to regain a sense of control

Christian provides the following useful tips to help regain this sense of control:

- Create predictability in your own life, maintain a routine to help keep you focused;
- Equip yourself with the facts that come from reliable and validated sources only. Avoid social media and do not entertain rumours on the subject of Covid-19;
- Be aware of your response, acknowledge your emotions and engage the rational mind;
- Learn to control your emotional responses and to stay calm;
- Remain focused on your goals and purpose, accepting that these may now need to be attained in different ways;
- Be flexible, and consider how you may need to adapt your plans;
- Stay positive and trust the national processes in place;
- Use lockdown time to get closer to achieving your goals;
- Be mindful and focus on the present.

"Focusing your energy on aspects that are within your control and making the best of enforced time at home can reduce feelings of fear and helplessness about the situation. If you are having difficulty coping, reach out for support."

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